COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

MousePerfect misses the mark

MousePerfect is a long way from what its name implies. This $35 program, marketed by MousePerfect Inc. of Clarkston, Ga., claims to "break the WordPerfect speed barrier" by driving the WordPerfect program with a mouse, a hand-held device that moves the cursor on the computer's screen as you move it on your table top.

Unfortunately, it doesn't deliver.

The idea behind the program is great. WordPerfect is one of the most popular PC programs, and it would be delightful if you could use a mouse with it. In fact, WordPerfect recently introduced a special version that operates with a mouse on the Apple Macintosh, but it doesn't work with IBM PCs or PC-compatible computers as does MousePerfect.

Anyone who's used a Macintosh knows just how handy a mouse can

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be. And now, more IBM-compatible users are hooking up the little gadgets to their systems to gain the speed and flexibility of clicking a button rather than pressing a series of keys to issue commands.

Unfortunately, that's where MousePerfect collapses. It not only fails to eliminate the need for keyboard commands, it keeps you jumping back and forth between the mouse and the keyboard.

For a program that claims to simplify, MousePerfect has some drastic deficiencies. Among the most frustrating:

✔ It's difficult to get the cursor exactly where you want it. Unlike the Apple program, this is very much like chasing a real mouse around the screen.

✔ Although MousePerfect provides a menu designed to provide a more natural and intuitive interface than WordPerfect, we found

quite the opposite. Unlike the handy pull-down menus of the Macintosh, this program provides a main menu across the bottom of the screen, which then takes you into sub-menus for the activity you choose. It works but not as clearly and easily as the Macintosh, and not even as fast as using WordPerfect alone.

It's too easy to get stuck. MousePerfect provides no way to use the mouse to cancel a command when you want to quit what you're doing. You must return to the keyboard to press the F-1 function key — another time-consuming switch.

✔ You cannot use the mouse to accept commands or indicate choices. For example, when saving a file that you're using, you must return to the keyboard and press "Return" to accept the file name prompt, and then "Y" or "N" to indicate your preference for replacing the existing file.

When working on a two-column screen, you can't use the mouse to move from the bottom of the left column to the top of the right.

There's just no way to do it without returning to the keyboard — but this is something the mouse should be able to accomplish with ease.

In short, MousePerfect is a good concept — which has been poorly executed. The ease-of-use of mouse operation and the popularity of WordPerfect make this an excellent time for the development of this type of program. I hope that the MousePerfect people will grab this opportunity to improve the program before it's too late.

The bottom line: It could have been the perfect "pet" for WordPerfect, but the current version of MousePerfect misses the mark. While I found it to be marginally helpful in some areas, I suggest you wait for improvements or an official version from the makers of WordPerfect before buying.

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